



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Information Collection; National Woodland Owner Survey

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice; request for comment.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, the Forest Service is seeking comments from all interested individuals and organizations on the revision of the National Woodland Owner Survey information collection.

DATES: Comments must be received in writing on or before **[INSERT DATE 60 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]** to be assured of consideration.

Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

ADDRESSES: Comments concerning this notice should be addressed to Brett Butler, USDA Forest Service, 160 Holdsworth Way, Amherst, MA 01003. Comments also may be submitted by e-mail to: brett.butler2@usda.gov.

Comments submitted in response to this notice may be made available to the public through relevant Web sites and upon request. For this reason, please do not include in your comments information of a confidential nature, such as sensitive personal information or proprietary information. If you send an e-mail comment, your e-mail address will be automatically captured and included as part of the comment that is placed in the public docket and made available on the Internet. Please note that responses to this public comment request containing any routine notice about the confidentiality of the communication will be treated as public comments that may be made available to the public notwithstanding the inclusion of the routine notice.

The public may inspect the draft supporting statement and/or comments received at 160 Holdsworth Way, Room 201, Amherst, MA 01003 during normal business hours. Visitors are encouraged to call ahead to 413-545-1387 to facilitate entry to the building. The public may request

an electronic copy of the draft supporting statement and/or any comments received be sent via return e-mail. Requests should be e-mailed to brett.butler2@usda.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Brett Butler, Northern Research Station, 413-545-1387. Individuals who use telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year, including holidays.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: National Woodland Owner Survey

OMB Number: 0596-0078

Type of Request: Revision

Abstract: There are an estimated 704 million acres of forestland across the United States, excluding interior Alaska. Of this forestland, over half is owned by millions of corporations, families, individuals, and other private groups with the remaining managed by over a thousand different federal, state, and local government agencies and tribal organizations. Understanding the attitudes and behaviors of the owners and managers of the forestland is critical for understanding the current and future state of the nation's forests. The Forest Service conducts the National Woodland Owner Survey (NWOS) to increase our understanding of:

- Who owns and manages the forestland of the United States;
- Why they own/manage it;
- How they have used it; and
- How they intend to use it.

This information is used by policy analysts, foresters, educators, and researchers to facilitate the planning and implementation of forest policies and programs and provides landowners, managers, and the public a better understanding of the social context of forests.

The Forest Service's direction and authority to conduct the NWOS is from the Forest and Range Land Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 and the Forest and Range Land Renewable

Resources Act of 1978. These acts assign responsibility for the inventory and assessment of forest and related renewable resources to the Forest Service. Additionally, the importance of an ownership survey in this inventory and assessment process is highlighted in the 2014 Farm Bill, the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998, and the recommendations of the Second Blue Ribbon Panel on the Forest Inventory and Analysis program (FIA).

Previous iterations of the NWOS were conducted in 1978, 1993, 2002-2006, 2011-2013, 2017-2018, and 2019-2023. Approval for the current iteration of the NWOS expires on March 31, 2025. Data collection for the next iteration is slated for 2024-2028. In order to implement changes and expansions made in the survey instruments for the entire cycle, we are seeking approval of this revision in time for the start of the cycle in 2024. If this revision is approved, the NWOS will be permitted to complete the first three years of the 2024-2028 cycle and will submit a renewal for completing the final two years of data collection at the appropriate time.

Changes proposed for this revision include minor survey answer choice formatting changes on all survey modules, a simplified large corporate ownership survey, a new small corporate ownership survey, a new tribal module, additional science modules, and additional question choices on the state form. Information will be collected related to:

- The characteristics of the land holdings;
- Attitudes and perceptions of the owners and managers;
- Resource uses and management activities; and
- Where applicable, landowner demographics.

Separate survey instruments are being developed for different target populations, including family forest ownerships, corporate and other private forest ownerships, private forest ownerships on selected U.S. affiliated protectorates and territories, residential urban landowners, tribal lands, and public lands. For the families and individuals, the dominant ownership group of forestland owners, a subset of ownerships will be sent survey instruments addressing the following topics, in addition to the core questions from the base survey instrument:

- Afforestation
- Agroforestry
- Carbon
- Climate change
- Cross-boundary cooperation
- Decision making
- Energy (solar/wind)
- Heirs' properties
- Invasive species
- Land transfer
- Landowner values
- Sense of place
- Timber
- Wellbeing
- Wildfire

The NWOS provides widely cited benchmarks for the number, extent, and characteristics of owners of forestland in the United States. These results have been used to assess the sustainability of forest resources at national, regional, and state levels; to implement and assess forest-land owner assistance programs; and to answer a variety of questions with topics ranging from fragmentation to the economics of timber production. This is the only effort to collect in-depth information about owners of forestland at the national scale. It provides longitudinal data to track ownership trends and allows for comparisons across regions of the country.

The respondents will be a statistically selected group of individuals, families, partnerships, corporations, nonprofit organizations and other private groups, tribal groups, and public landowners that own forestland in the United States. A well distributed, random set of sampling points has been established across the country. At each point, remotely sensed data, such as aerial photographs, will

be used to identify forested points. For the forested points, public records will be used to identify the owners of record (i.e., the names and addresses of the landowners who will be contacted). The target number of respondents for the base NWOS implementation is 250 per state.

The NWOS will utilize a mixed-mode survey technique involving cognitive interviews, focus groups, self-administered survey, and telephone interviews. Cognitive interviews will be used to test specific questions and explore new topics or populations of interest. Focus groups will be used to provide more in-depth understanding of the responses and to explore new areas of inquiry.

The implementation of the self-administered survey, which will represent the majority of the responses, will involve up to four contacts. First, a pre-notice postcard will be sent to all potential respondents describing this information collection and why the information is being collected. Second, a survey with a cover letter and pre-paid return envelope will be sent to the potential respondents. The cover letter will reiterate the purpose of this information collection and provide the respondents with all legally required information. Third, a reminder will be mailed to thank the respondents and encourage the non-respondents to reply. Those who have yet to respond will be sent a new survey, cover letter, and pre-paid return envelope. Telephone interviews will be used for follow-up with non-respondents. For corporations, the primary survey instrument will be electronic, and for all other owners, the primary survey instrument will be paper forms with the option for completing the survey electronically online. We will use Participatory Action Research (PAR) and cognitive interviews to explore tribal land ownerships.

Forest Service researchers will coordinate all components of this information collection. Forest Service personnel with assistance provided by cooperators at the Family Forest Research Center located at the University of Massachusetts Amherst will conduct the mail portion of the survey, cognitive interviews, focus groups, and telephone follow-ups. Data will be compiled and edited by Forest Service and Family Forest Research Center personnel. Forest Service researchers and cooperators will analyze the collected data. National, regional, and state-level results will be publicly available and electronically distributed.

This information collection will generate scientifically based, statistically-reliable, up-to-date information about the owners of forestland in the United States. The results of these efforts will provide more reliable information on this important and dynamic segment of the United States population, thus facilitating more complete assessments of the country's forestland resources and improved planning and implementation of forestry programs on state, regional, and national levels.

Affected Public: Individuals and households and the private sector (businesses and non-profit organizations), tribes, and public entities.

Estimate of Burden Per Response: 25 minutes for families, individuals, and other private groups with small holdings; 30 minutes for corporations with large holdings; 60 minutes for tribal entities, and 15 minutes for public entities.

Estimated Annual Number of Respondents: 5,291

Estimated Annual Number of Responses per Respondent: 1

Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents: 3,861 hours

Comment is Invited: Comment is invited on: (1) whether this collection of information is necessary for the stated purposes and the proper performance of the functions of the Agency, including whether the information will have practical or scientific utility; (2) the accuracy of the Agency's estimate of the burden of the collection of information, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (3) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (4) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on respondents, including the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

All comments received in response to this notice, including names and addresses when provided, will be a matter of public record. Comments will be summarized and included in the submission request toward Office of Management and Budget approval.

Linda S. Heath,

Acting Deputy Chief, Research & Development.

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